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THE SOCIAL CENTER  
IN KANSAS CITY, MO.



PUBLISHED BY  
RESEARCH BUREAU OF THE  
BOARD OF PUBLIC WELFARE  
JUNE, 1913



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# THE SOCIAL CENTER

—AND—

## ITS INFLUENCE ON THE COMMUNITY LIFE IN KANSAS CITY

Popular demand for social centers in Kansas City is increasing by geometric progression. Beginning with a single school two years ago and increasing to eight schools in 1911-12, it has developed until forty-five schools and two churches were open to the public last winter, having 494 meetings, with a total attendance of 55,880 people. We now regard this movement as a fixture in the social life of Kansas City. The coming season promises to awaken universal attention to its demands, and the work in the fields already started will become more intensive. The experience of New York City, Rochester, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee and several other cities has demonstrated beyond question that there is a nation-wide demand for this new educational, recreational force.

**A Socializing Agency.** The tendency of the rapid growth of the American city is to make the people unsocial and self-centered.

The neighborhood spirit must be developed to secure harmony and co-operation among the people. The Social Center brings them together in their own school house, gets them acquainted with one another, interests them in the same enterprises, cultivates friendliness and acquaintance, unifies the neighborhood for civic improvement and community welfare, educates and cultivates aesthetic taste, promotes the continuation of study, and provides wholesome amusement and recreation for the whole community. Much has been said about the potency of the social center as a force for the Americanization of immigrants—a point well taken. We add to this that it furnishes a means for the Americanization of Americans, which is also much needed.

**Variety of Activities.** Prof. Edward J. Ward, Advisor in Civic and Social Center Development, University of Wisconsin, in his

book, "The Social Center," presents convincing arguments for the development of various activities in the social center:

1. The school is the logical center of the precinct, just as the city hall is the center of the city, and the capitol is the logical center of the state and nation. The school should therefore be the polling place of the precinct.

2. The social center furnishes a place of deliberation and provides an opportunity for the people to discuss in a friendly manner the problems vital to their community.

It is also a place for:

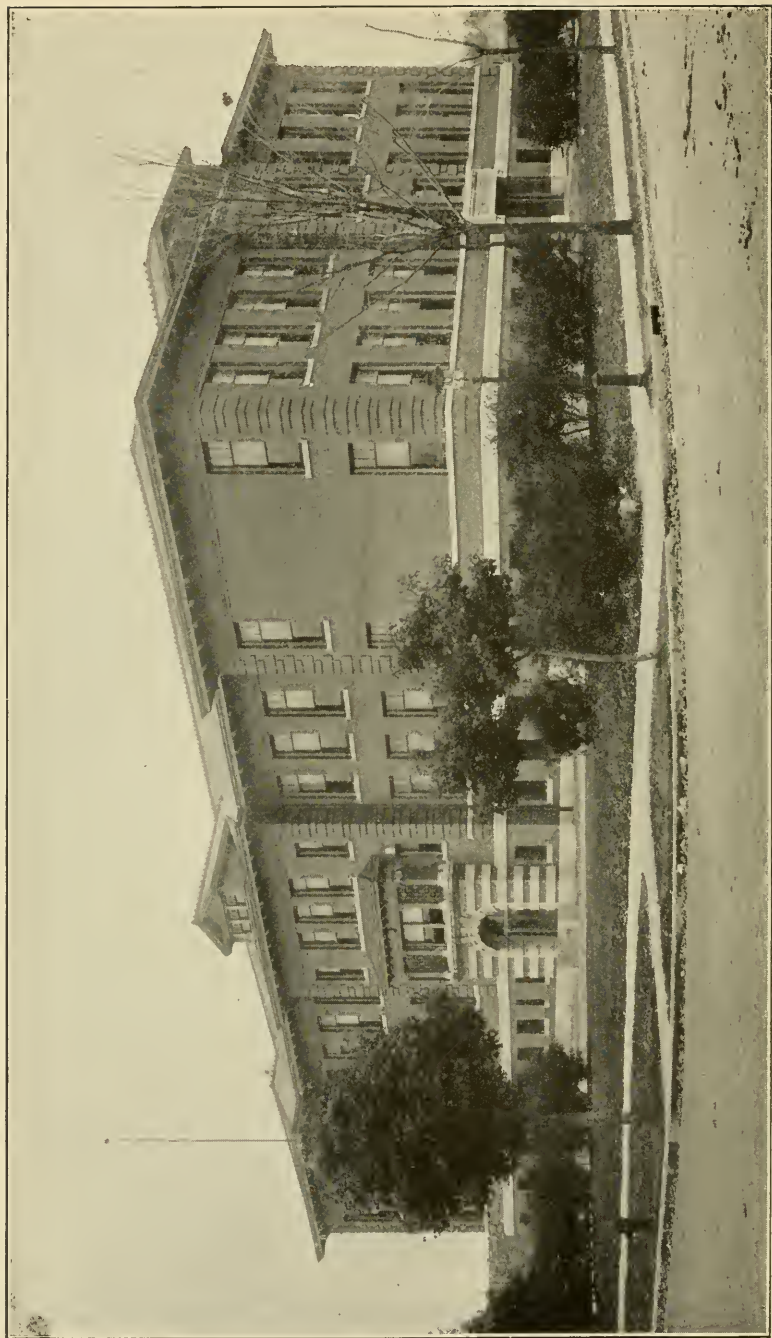
3. The voters' league, uniting the people for civic improvement.
4. A public lecture course, providing the best talent available, for the education and entertainment of the people.
5. The branch public library, extending the benefits of the public library into every neighborhood in the city.
6. Public art exhibitions, cultivating the aesthetic taste of the people.
7. Music centers, providing concerts by high grade talent and furnishing an opportunity for local musicians to entertain.
8. The Festival center—a logical place in which to celebrate the national holidays for the inspiration of patriotism and community interest.
9. A recreation center, providing innocent dances, gymnastics and games, and the organization of clubs.
10. An employment center, providing a place to bring employer and employee in touch with one another.
11. The establishment of a branch of the health board in the line of a medical advisor for the community to look after matters pertaining to the general health.
12. A place for all the people of the community to become acquainted.

**Beginnings in New York.** A precursor of the social center began in 1888 in New York City, in the form of free lecture courses, and has extended to about 170 schools and halls. Dr. Henry M. Leipziger, supervisor of the public lectures, occupies in this relation a position co-ordinate with the office of superintendents of schools. The main idea of the lecture course is instruction, and the lectures cover all the great divisions of human knowledge upon such subjects as sanitation, health, civics, natural science, descriptive geography, art, music, literature, etc. They have proven exceedingly popular, and by means of examinations and collateral reading, have developed the habit of study and a larger use of the excellent collection of books in the various public libraries of the city. The results observed from these public lectures during the past twenty years are summarized by Professor Ward as follows:

1. Continuation of systematic study.
2. Americanization of immigrants.
3. Improvement of sanitation and health.
4. Increased interest in city's government.
5. The formation of people's forums for the discussion of social and economic questions.
6. Greater efficiency and earning power.
7. Appreciation of art and science museums.
8. Improved reading taste of the people.
9. Wider and larger interest in the finer things of life.

**The Rochester Movement.** The movement took real form in Rochester, New York, on February 15, 1907, when delegates from eleven influential organizations met and formulated the request that the mayor and common council put an item of \$5,000 in the tax levy for social center development. The beginning was made in No. 14 school building, which was selected because it was very near the middle of the city. The first meeting was held Friday evening, November 1, 1908, and addressed by President Forbes, who set forth very definitely the basic, fraternal, co-operative idea of the social center as an institution by which the community might serve itself. After some music by the neighborhood orchestra, organized for the social center, there was a free hour for social intercourse and acquaintance. At first there were but twelve active members. Throughout the season there were seventy-two meetings in which citizens gathered to discuss political and economic topics. Three schools were used as neighborhood club houses during the first season. These meetings were very successful. The appropriation for the second year was \$10,000, which made possible, in addition to the installation of new equipment and the opening of more recreation fields out of doors, the opening of three centers. These were open not only each evening, but also—at the request of the Minister's Association—on Sunday afternoon. This was done to provide a wholesome place of entertainment and recreation for young men and women who were wont to give their Sunday afternoons to questionable commercial recreation. The movement has developed despite some opposition, until at present there are 16 clubs, with 1,500 active members. Justice Charles E. Hughes said of this civic club development in Rochester: "I am more interested in what you are doing and what it stands for than anything else in the world. You are buttressing the foundations of democracy."

Prof. Geo. M. Forbes, president of the Board of Education of Rochester, who has had abundant opportunity to study the influence of the movement, makes the following significant statement: "You who have not witnessed it cannot understand how party spirit, class spirit, and even race spirit fade out in the intense civic and community atmosphere of these Neighborhood Civic Clubs. It is pure democracy getting an opportunity to inform itself, working itself free from prejudice and narrowness by absolutely free and unrestricted discussion of any question, and eager to apply its new found spirit of brotherhood to the development and extension of community enterprises. Political liberty alone, even when it finds expression in universal suffrage, cannot solve the problem of democracy. The only salvation of democracy is in the development of the community spirit. This spirit is latent in every man. It only needs its appropriate stimulus to arouse it, the appropriate soil and atmosphere in which it may grow. Our democracy has yet to de-



BENTON SCHOOL. A Very Popular Social Center.

velop institutions which are generally communal in the sense that they appeal to and develop the objective, the communal interests—that is, reveal the joy and satisfaction which come from co-operative effort for the common good; in short, institutions which break down the spirit and the result of exclusiveness and bring forth the recognition of man as man. Now the Neighborhood Civic Club seems to be exactly the appropriate stimulus and soil to develop this civic spirit.”

**National Conference.** In the autumn of 1911 the first national conference on social center development met at Madison, under the auspices of the University Extension Division of the Wisconsin University. Delegates came from all parts of the United States, representing city clubs, boards of education, welfare movements, churches, universities and various associations for civic and social betterment. A new enthusiasm and hope for the future permeated the air, and the key-note of the convention was that the social center movement in the United States is the beginning of a new democracy in extending the spirit of interest in public affairs to the homes of the people. The meeting resulted in the organization of the “Social Center Association of America,” whose purpose it is “to promote the development of intelligent public spirit through community use of the common school house for free discussion of public questions and all wholesome civic, educational and recreational activities. President Wilson, who was present at the meeting as Governor of New Jersey, said: “What I see in this movement is a recovery of the constructive and creative genius of the American people.”

### **SOCIAL CENTERS IN KANSAS CITY.**

The Social Center movement began in Kansas City when the Board of Education granted to the Board of Public Welfare the use of the Franklin School for several lectures and entertainments in the winter of 1910-11.

During the season of 1911-12 the eight public schools opened by request of the Board of Public Welfare were the Switzer, Greenwood, Benton, Garrison, Emerson, Karnes, Morse and Adams. The Holy Rosary (Parochial) was also opened for meetings. The lecture rooms and auditoriums of several churches of different denominations were used for the discussion of civic questions. Forty-nine meetings of all kinds were held with a total attendance of 13,150. Thirty-two addresses on health, educational and popular topics were delivered. Seventeen club and group meetings were held. Six high grade concerts were given.

One hundred and thirty-five general meetings promoted by this department in the sixteen social centers of Kansas City during the past season had a total attendance of 22,467. The meetings

held in the early fall were generally not very well attended on account of counter attractions incident to the political campaign. As the winter advanced, interest greatly increased, and the last meetings were by far the most interesting and best attended since the inception of the social center in this city.

The most popular meetings were the musicales, stereopticon lectures, moving picture exhibitions and entertainments by local talent. The following are some of the subjects:

**Civic Discussions—**

- Municipal Ownership.
- Constitutional School Amendments.
- School Bond Issue.
- The City's Machinery of Government.
- Community Co-operation.
- Vocational Training.
- The Social Center as a Unifying Force.

**Sociological and Health Topics—**

- The Relation of Housing to Morals, Health and Happiness.
- Street Trades and Morals.
- Vacant Lot Gardening.
- The Relation of the Medical Profession to Social Work.
- Vacation Schools and Summer Camps.
- Causes of Juvenile Delinquency.
- Recreation and Health.
- Censorship of Motion Pictures.
- Adenoids and Incurability.
- Postal Savings Bank.

**Motion Pictures—**

- Scenes from the Baltic Army.
- Paris and its Monuments.
- The Rubber Industry.
- The Niagara Falls—Summer and Winter.
- The Yellowstone National Park.
- Washington Crossing the Delaware.
- War on the Mosquito.
- The Fly Pest.
- The Lizard Family.

**Entertainment—**

- Folk Dancing.
- Calisthenic Drills.
- Professional Concerts.
- Musicals by Home Talent.
- Impersonations.
- School Entertainments.
- Stereopticon Description of Travels.

The meetings above described are further classified in the following table:

**Table No. 1. General Meetings Under Auspices of Board of Public Welfare**  
**School Year 1912-13**

LOCATION	Civic Discussions	Community Improvement	School Entertainments	Musicals	Motion Pictures	Illustrated Lectures	Parent Teachers	Patriotic	Miscellaneous	Total	Estimated Attendance
1. Adams	1	1			2	1				4	800
2. Ashland	3			1	1	1				4	1,066
3. Benton	2	1	1	3	1	1	4		1	14	2,360
4. Clay	1	3		2	1	1	7			14	2,300
5. Emerson					3		1			8	500
6. Garrison					2	2	2	2		8	900
7. Greenwood	3	1	2	2	2	2	6		1	18	3,500
8. Holy Rosary	1	2		1	1			2		6	1,650
9. Irving	8			1			9		2	20	2,500
10. Karnes		1					1			1	50
11. Lincoln High					1	1				3	750
12. Morse				5	1	2				8	1,616
13. St. Stephens	1				2					3	800
14. Switzer	1	1	1	2		1				6	1,250
15. Washington	1	1		1		2				4	500
16. Wendell Phillips	1	1		1		1	10			14	1,925
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>22,467</b>

**Some of  
The Talent.**

Several talented musicians and impersonators gave their services gratuitously to the great pleasure of the people. Professor Rudolph King and his assistants have given a number of splendid concerts during the winter. Special mention is also due the Philanthropic and Educational Committee of the Kansas City Musical Club, Mrs. Ella C. Hood, Elocutionist; Dr. Delamater, Assistant Health Commissioner, and the principals and chairmen of the various schools where these meetings were held. A helpful course of illustrated lectures was given in several schools by Milton Fairchild of the educational Institution for Moral Instruction. The subjects of these lectures were, "Conduct Becoming a Gentleman," "Thrift in School," "The True Sportsman," and "When I Am Grown Up." Mr. Ralph Emmett Avery presented a splendid stereopticon lecture on "The Panama Canal" in seven of the schools.

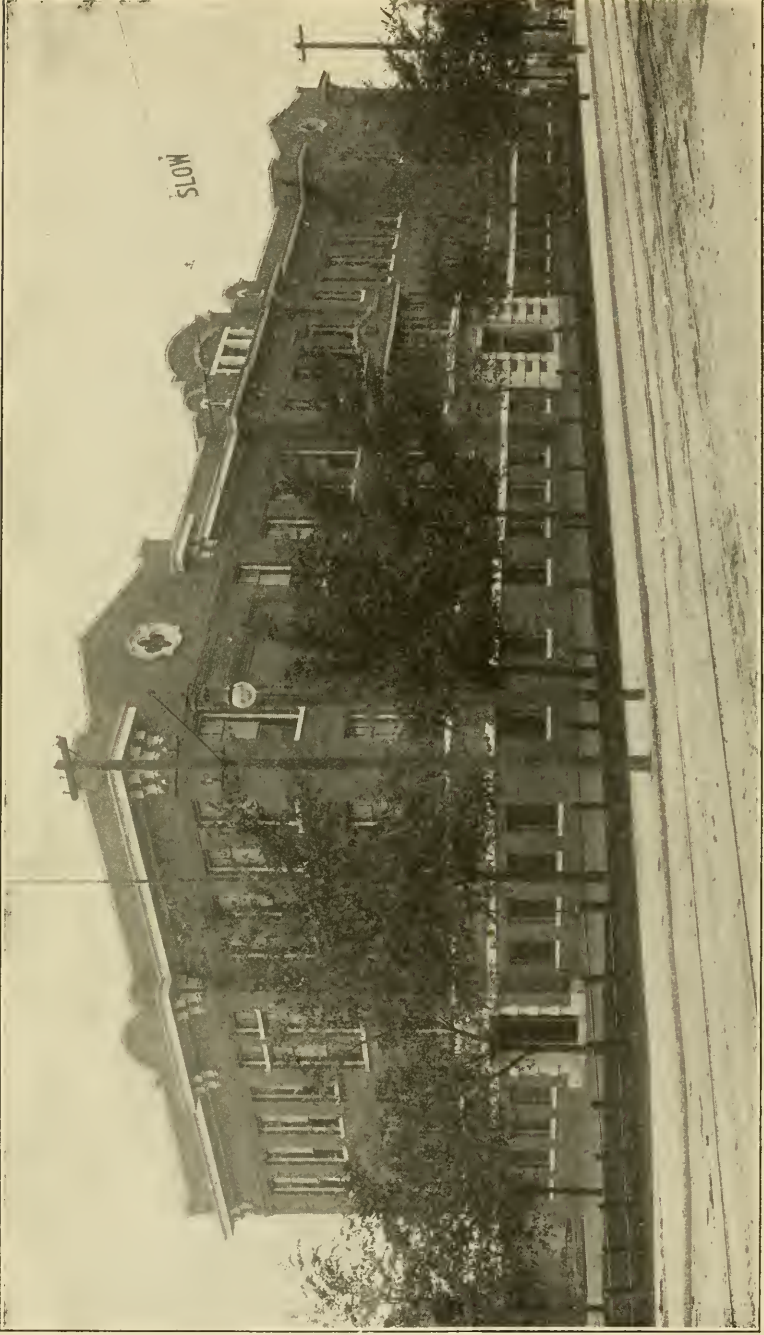
One school—the Karnes—not having a suitable room for general meetings, used the auditorium of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church for all its general meetings, through the kindness of Father Delbecchi. A notable event of the season was a concert given in that hall Tuesday evening, May 21, 1913, by the Italian Choral Club, which was organized and trained in the Karnes School Social Center. The concert was well attended and the music was of high grade. The hall of St. Stephen's Catholic Church was used in like manner through the courtesy of Father Scanlan. With these exceptions, the Social Center in Churches has not been continued this season because of the increased popular demand for meetings in the schools.

**Part Played  
by this Board.**

It is the purpose of the Board of Public Welfare to act as promoter and not custodian of this movement. The school house belongs to the people and the social center should be their institution. We are gratified to know that thirty-one schools not under our direction have held 172 meetings during the past winter, with an estimated attendance of 28,934, and that these meetings were for the purpose of discussing questions on civic and community improvement, presenting musicals, moving pictures, illustrated lectures, for school entertainments and patriotic discussions. While the parent-teachers' meetings and school entertainments predominated, the subjects discussed were very similar to those of the meetings under our direction.

The following table gives a fair estimate of the extent and nature of these meetings:

SCHOOL,	Civic Dis- tricts	Community Improvement	School Entertainment	Musicals	Motion Pictures	Illustrated Lectures	Parent Teachers	Patriotic	Miscellaneous	Total	At- tendance
1 Allen.....	.....	.....	2	.....	.....	.....	3	1	1	3	1700
2 Attacks.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	6	.....	.....	4	500
3 Bancroft.....	.....	.....	1	1	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	7	600
4 Bristol.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	1	4	500
5 Chase.....	3	2	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	6	225
6 Douglas.....	1	.....	2	.....	.....	.....	1	1	.....	4	109
7 E. C. White.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	4	.....	.....	.....	4	500
8 Frances Willard.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	5	20
9 Geo. B. Lorgan.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	4	.....	.....	1	200
10 Henry C. Kumpf.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	5	.....	.....	4	200
11 Horace Mann.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	8	.....	4	5	2350
12 James.....	1	8	2	.....	.....	2	9	1	3	25	2500
13 Jefferson.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	2	.....	.....	3	500
14 Kensington.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	2	300
15 Lincoln Elementary.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	4	.....	1	4	150
16 Lincoln High.....	.....	.....	3	.....	.....	.....	4	3	.....	11	2050
17 Lykins.....	1	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	2	1	2	7	600
18 Manchester.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	1	800
19 Madison.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	4	.....	.....	4	200
20 McCoy.....	2	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	2	.....	.....	4	360
21 Mt. Washington.....	.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	2	600
22 Manual Training High.....	.....	1	2	1	.....	4	.....	.....	1	9	7200
23 Martin.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	250
24 Norman.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	4	.....	.....	7	500
25 Rollins.....	.....	.....	1	.....	1	.....	6	.....	.....	7	780
26 Sanford B. Ladd.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	1000
27 Sixty-first Street.....	.....	.....	3	.....	.....	.....	1	.....	1	1	1300
28 Sumner.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	1	1	.....	3	500
29 Van Horn.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	.....	7	.....	.....	9	540
30 Woodland.....	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	2	.....	.....	3	600
31 Yeager.....	.....	.....	4	.....	.....	1	.....	.....	2	7	1600
Total.....	8	15	31	3	1	12	77	8	17	172	28934



GREENWOOD SCHOOL. A Social Center With Fine Civic Spirit.

### **Opinion of School Principals.**

Letters from principals of various schools express the keenest interest in the movement. Several of these principals in schools where it was impossible to hold meetings during the past winter because of no lights, bad streets, or inadequate assembly rooms, have expressed friendliness for the meetings and the hope that provisions will be made for their schools in the near future. The following brief extracts from their letters are significant: "I am heartily in sympathy with every move that tends toward social center work"; "I believe neighborhood meetings to be of inestimable value in unifying a community"; "I believe it a great uplifting movement and can be made to do a great deal of good in the way of unification and in creating an educational atmosphere among the patrons." One principal who did not have lights united efforts with the pastor of a church across the street. He said: "We have had fine success with this social center lecture course and the lantern slide pictures.

Letters from principals of schools where social centers were held by principals and members of the community independent of the Board of Public Welfare have expressed themselves as follows: "I think our meetings have been helpful to our school, and expect greater results in the future"; "A social center is of great value in bringing home and school in closer touch"; "I am convinced that such meetings are of wonderful help to both parents and teachers in bringing about mutual respect and in securing co-operation"; "We place a very high value upon the social center work in unifying the community, in placing the right civic ideals before the people and in bringing school and patrons closer together, with its most beneficial result upon the child"; "We have a flourishing and helpful patron's association in our school"; "I think there is much good to come from such meetings." One high school principal says: "I am thoroughly in sympathy with the social center movement and think that the high schools after they become localized can do a good work in the way of evening exercises"; "We believe that such gatherings are conducive to community welfare from the standpoint of patriotism, civic pride, and neighborhood improvement."

### **Clubs.**

The accompanying Chart (No. 3) shows the beginnings of group meetings in several schools where clubs have been organized. It has been impossible to do this work very extensively because of the lack of funds to employ sufficient leaders, but wherever the groups have been organized the attendance has been regular and the interest surprisingly good. There is no reason why clubs should not be developed in all the schools. A great many young men and women are compelled by the struggle of the family for sustenance to leave school before they have completed their high school course, or even before finishing the grades. Group meetings properly conducted are an inspiration to the young people to continue

their education in the way of the study of scientific, literary, philosophical, social, religious or recreational subjects.

**Table No. 3. Group Meetings Under Auspices of Board of Public Welfare**

**School Year 1912-13**

SCHOOL	Literary	Gymnastic	Social and Program	Musical	Total	Attendance
1. Garrison (Orchestra).....	.....	.....	.....	12	12	226
2. Karnes (Italian Choral Club) ..	.....	.....	.....	21	21	1,020
3. Karnes (Orchestra) .....	.....	.....	.....	24	24	260
4. Lincoln High .....	1	.....	1	.....	2	300
5. Morse .....	1	7	10	.....	18	226
6. Switzer (Gym. Club) .....	.....	51	.....	.....	51	1,020
7. Switzer (T. A. D.) .....	18	18	.....	.....	36	252
8. Wendall Phillips.....	.....	13	10	.....	23	1,175
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>4,479</b>

**Motion**

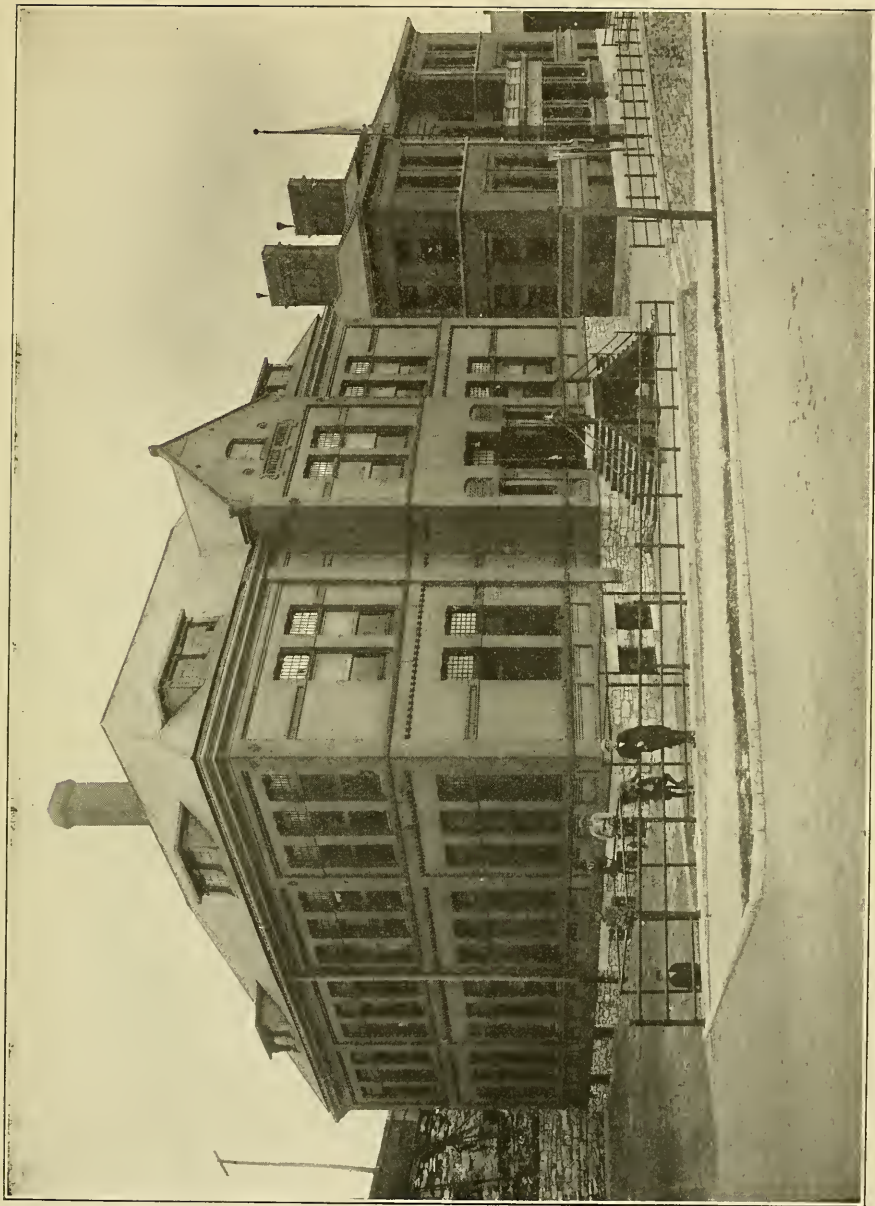
**Pictures.**

A philanthropic citizen of Kansas City recently presented to the Board of Public Welfare a complete moving picture outfit for the use of social centers.

This machine was used with splendid effect in all of the schools where electric lights were available during the past winter. The Board of Education provided electric lights as rapidly as possible in all the schools where this department requested. A very encouraging beginning was made in this kind of entertainment. Educational reels depicting historical, scenic, industrial and scientific subjects of a highly interesting character were presented in all of these schools. This form of entertainment has proven most popular wherever used, and will undoubtedly be among the most useful that we can employ in the social center work.

**Co-operation.**

We have had the heartiest co-operation from the Board of Education ever since the inception of the movement. We cannot recall a single request we have made that has been refused. The Parent-Teachers' Association which is being organized in most of the schools of the city is in thorough accord with the department in making the social center movement successful. Committees have been appointed by the auxiliaries in the various schools, and we regard this as a stepping-stone in the direction of transferring the responsibility of the movement to the local committees around the various schools. The Neighborhood Improvement Associations, organized in the various school districts which are now forming a federation for the city, should find the school houses to be their natural meeting place. They correspond to the Neighborhood Civic Clubs so successful in Rochester and some other cities.



SWITZER SCHOOL, One of the First Social Centers.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR.

There is no apparent reason why the meetings of next winter should not be far better than they have been in the past.

**District Branches.** If the school house is a social center, it may, of course, include district offices for sanitary inspectors, or Board of Public Welfare workers, or a branch library, or a pure milk station, and such activities as these would have to be governed according to the convenience of the departments which might possibly have district offices, and also by the convenience of the school which might or might not be able to furnish the necessary space. The accessories can be added as demands arise.

**Group Meetings.** Until then we must confine our plans to social center meetings. These may be broadly divided into group meetings and general meetings. The group meetings should consist of recreation clubs or literary clubs, reading circles, clubs whose membership should be determined on the basis of age or congeniality, and their activities should be guided by leaders, if composed of children or comparatively young people.

**General Meetings.** The general meetings might be classified according to their character into about three classes: (1) One kind of meetings would be those where civic questions or community problems were discussed by some official or competent speaker, or debated by selected local citizens, after which free discussion should be taken up by the audience. These meetings could be conducted practically without expense and would be of great educational value. (2) Then there could be such a set of recreational entertainments as usually comprise a popular lecture course. It

**Lecture Circuits.** would be a splendid plan to organize schools and talent during the coming season so as to be able to form circuits of lectures, entertainments, musicals and moving picture demonstrations, so that every school in the whole city might have an opportunity to get the very best service possible. (3) Finally, there might be a few entertainments given by local talent, such as the annual school entertainment, and an occasional spelling match, debate, or a dramatic production by some club.

The greatest handicap at present is the lack of sufficient funds to carry on this work extensively. The growth of the movement will depend upon the active interest of the citizens.





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